**Supporting Children’s Arrangements - Assessing Relatives and Friends (SCAARF): practice aid for assessing wider family and friends to support arrangements for children.**

**Child/ren:**

Many children can benefit from seeing a parent or other relative but need this to be supported or supervised for a variety of reasons. Friends or family members can be the people best placed to do this, but assessment and support may be necessary.

The suitability of a friend or family member is not just about making a judgement about the person providing the support, but a combination of factors including family relationships, the availability of resources, clarity about what is expected, and a range of diversity issues. This is what needs to be assessed.

This practice aid is designed to ensure that all relevant areas are covered, and that there is clarity about what is required. It can be used to prepare for an interview, as a checklist following an assessment, or as a guide for a written report. It is not intended as something to be used directly with the person being considered to support the arrangements.

If more than one family member is responsible for the support/supervision, it is important that each family member’s ability to do this is assessed.

Guidance in completing this practice aid can be found at the end of the document.

**Part I: The Support/Supervision requirements**

The child’s time needs to be supervised/ supported because:

The level of supervision required is (Please tick 🗹):

All conversations must be heard. Parent cannot leave supervisor’s sight.

Supervisor needs to be present, but parent may take the child to separate rooms. Not all conversations need to be listened to.

General support only. Parent can take the child out to the park and shops without supervisor.

As required by the situation. Supervisor is teaching or modelling childcare skills, or supporting relationships.

Who else can be present?

What recording is required? (Please tick 🗹)

No recording necessary, unless there is an unexpected incident

General written note made of dates, activities, etc.

Written notes made of key events, anything significant that is said, of child’s reactions

***Note that if detailed written recordings are required, this is unlikely to be suitable for family and friends supervision.***

Are there any particular areas which need to be observed/ assessed? If so, what are these?

How has the plan been explained to the child/ren? Who has done this? Please comment on child/ren’s level of understanding.

The supervision is (Please tick 🗹):

a long-term arrangement

for a set number of sessions, as part of an assessment

**Part II: Assessing suitability**

**Positive assessment**

**Some concerns**

**Significant concerns**

*Safeguarding considerations*

1. The supervisor understands the reason for supervision.
2. The supervisor agrees with, or fully accepts, the need for supervision.
3. If needed, the supervisor would be capable of challenging the parent.
4. The supervisor would report problems to the relevant professional if required.

*Relationship considerations*

*Practical considerations*

1. The supervisor and the parent have a good relationship.
2. The supervisor is trusted by all parties.
3. The supervisor has the skills and confidence to make judgements/ exercise discretion if needed.
4. The child is [or will be] familiar with the supervisor.
5. The supervisor has appropriate skills and experience for a child/ children of this age.
6. The supervisor has the skills to explain things to the child; to handle distress in the parent or the child; to manage goodbyes.
7. All diversity issues have been considered, for supervisor, child and parent.

1. The venue is clear and suitable.
2. The length and frequency of the time together is realistic.
3. The expectations are clearly understood by the supervisor.
4. There is an agreed contingency plan in case of sickness.
5. There is clarity about times and handovers.
6. All relevant parties have each other’s contact details.
7. The supervisor knows who to contact if advice is needed.
8. The supervisor has appropriate car seats [if necessary].
9. Are there any other issues to consider which may impact on the child?

**Part III: Conclusion**

The supervisory arrangement is suitable and can proceed.

**OR**

There is potential for this arrangement to be suitable within the timetable required, but the following issues need to be addressed:

**OR**

This supervisory arrangementwould not be appropriate for the following reasons:

**Completed by:**

**Professional role:**

**Date:** Click or tap to enter a date.

**Guidance**

**Part I**

There has to be a definite reason for supervision. It is not sufficient that it makes the parent with care feel reassured. The presence of support or supervision can be misused to make a statement that the other parent is somehow inadequate or untrustworthy. The purpose of this section is to ensure there is clarity about the purpose of supervision. Unless everyone is clear, there is a possibility of misunderstanding or criticism. It will also ensure that supervision or support is not more restrictive than is necessary.

There is an important distinction between:

**Supervised spending time arrangements:** This is to ensure children are kept safe, for example from sexual abuse, confusing or frightening comments, or removal from the venue.

**Supported spending time arrangements:** This is to assist in the building or rebuilding of relationships, or to teach parenting skills.

The duration and frequency of support/supervision may have been set by a court order or a child protection plan. As a general rule, the most intense levels of supervision are difficult for family members, as it may require accompanying a child and parent to the toilet to prevent secretive conversations. Two supervisors may be needed where there is more than one child, and to allow short breaks. This level of supervision cannot be maintained for long periods of time [more than two hours], or very frequently [more than 2-3 times a week].

The advantages of supervision or support by family members include:

1. Flexibility
2. Familiarity and naturalness for the child
3. It has the potential to continue for a longer period
4. The family member may know the subtle signs to look out for in the parent
5. The child may get to know other safe family members as well as just the parent with whom they are seeing.

The advantages of a professional supervisor include:

1. There is no risk of concerns being minimised due to family loyalty
2. Challenges will not lead to stresses within the child’s family
3. A professional can provide evidence in court much more easily
4. A professional will have had training and experience
5. A professional will have regular supervision and back-up

This tool is not designed to assess whether supervision by a professional is most appropriate. It may be remembered, however, that supervision of spending time arrangements by a child’s foster parent is rarely thought to be best practice, and similar principles may apply to kinship care where there has been significant harm by the parent, or where a child has complex needs.

The risk of misunderstanding will be minimised if a written contract or agreement is drawn up. As well as exact times, dates, venues and pick-up/ return arrangements, it can cover practical issues such as:

* what information is needed from the children’s main carer in advance [eg if the child has not been well, or has had a significant experience]?
* What activities are possible? [For example, many children love swimming as a contact activity, but this may be difficult to supervise, especially if mixed sexes are involved].
* what feedback from this contact is needed for the main carer, and who will give it?
* who will provide food and spare clothes/ nappies?
* who will be responsible for planning activities and ensuring there are sufficient toys?
* who will be responsible for discipline?
* who else can be present? This might include other adults or other children, members of the supervisor’s family, or of the parent’s family.
* what will happen if someone is unwell or cannot come for other reasons? Will another contact be offered?
* what should happen if any person arrives late?

It will also cover safety issues, relevant to the concerns for this child:

* clarity on what can, and what cannot, be said to the children
* rules for photographs, and posting images taken in during the spending time arrangements on social media
* a plan to deal with a parent arriving under the influence of alcohol or drugs

The clearer everything is, the less chance there will be of the child/ren being exposed to a confusing or distressing situation during the spending time arrangements.

*A template for a written agreement is presented alongside this practice aid.*

Explaining the plan to the children: It must not be assumed that the child knows what the arrangement is, or why it is in place. Even if it has been explained to him or her, it is likely that this will need to be done a number of times, as the child’s assumptions, hopes and expectations will affect his or her sense of what is happening. Think about language that is positive and non-blaming, focussing on ‘keeping you safe’. An older child will benefit from knowing any ground rules so that they are not unknowingly caught up in a breaking these, with any consequences that might arise.

Has the child’s age and development been considered, together with any additional needs?

**Part II**

*The following relate to each of the considerations set out.*

*The first set of considerations are the most important, and in situations of high risk a negative judgement on any one of these would be likely to indicate that the supervision arrangement is not suitable.*

1. The supervisor is unlikely to have had access to all the documents, or been present at all the meetings, in which risks have been discussed. S/he is more likely to have been exposed to the parent’s version of events. Some risk factors may seem obvious to a professional who has had training in the area, but not to a lay person. Unless the supervisor understands the concerns, s/he cannot be effective. It is easier for a worker to assume more knowledge than is fair. Would any written documents be appropriate? Or there may be need for a meeting with the worker.
2. This consideration follows on but is more particular to the situation. The parent may have approached the supervisor, who may agree to supervise out of a sense of loyalty or friendship. It will then be hard for the supervisor to notice problems, or s/he may excuse them.
3. This includes having a relationship with the parent in which this is possible and knowing what to look out for. It can be difficult to stand up to a family member. Alternatively, the parent may be threatening, or fragile, such that the relative is anxious about upsetting him/ her. A family member might benefit from being given explicit permission to challenge the parent, in the presence of the professional, and perhaps a form of words or actions agreed on, to make it easier. This can be included in the written agreement.
4. A close family member may be motivated to prevent professional intrusion into the family, especially if there is a fear that the result of any challenge may be that the contact may be stopped, or even that the child may be removed from the family altogether. In cases like this, professional supervision is likely to be necessary. On a practical note, has the supervisor got the details of who to contact, including a contingency contact number in case that worker is unavailable, or it is out of hours?

*The next set of considerations relate to factors that will make the arrangements a positive experience or may get in the way of this.*

1. A ‘good’ relationship does not mean a close relationship, but one that can be business-like and not too emotionally involved- whether too collusive, or too critical. A relationship that is too familiar could well present its own difficulties. For example, a brother or sister of the parent, where there has been a sense of rivalry, could make for a difficult balance. A parent may find that, if his or her own parent is placed in an authority role, it feels too much like being a child again. This may not bring out the best in the parent.
2. An arrangement is going to be more stable if the supervisor is respected by all parties. If at all possible, there should be joint planning, and a meeting such as a Family Group Conference would be an ideal environment for this. If possible, situations in which supervisor is imposed, or put forward with minimal planning [as can happen in court] should be the last resort.
3. There are bound to be situations that arise in which a supervisor has to make flexible judgements as new situations come up. A parent may well test out the boundaries, or the child may suddenly say something unexpected. It may help a supervisor to have access to a professional, or even have regular consultation. Can the supervisor give examples of flexible thinking from other situations?
4. It will help if the child is not distracted by the supervisor, either because he or she is totally unknown [and so a source of anxiety or curiosity], or too well known. For example, if a grandparent is both caring for the child, and also supervising the contact, it would be natural for the child to go to the primary carer in the event of any upset, such as falling over. A carer may also be less tolerant of things being done differently. Except in the case of very young children, it will help if the child can meet the supervisor beforehand, even if only briefly, and to have an understanding of why he or she is there. Keeping the same supervisor is helpful in reducing distraction.
5. The supervisor will need to have a sensible understanding of how a child is thinking and behaving, relevant to the child’s age and developmental stage, as well as any prior experiences, or disabilities such as being on the autistic spectrum. An assessment should identify the source of the supervisor’s knowledge and experience. The supervisor can take time to learn about child development through reading, on-line resources or children’s centres [see *Suggested Reading* below]. There may be some specific knowledge that is required: for example, it is not uncommon for children to criticise their current carer, or even make allegations, when with a parent. This may be a way of trying to please the parent but could be misunderstood.
6. Linked with this, would the supervisor have the understanding to speak with a child in an appropriate way. For example, goodbyes can be difficult, and a child may become emotional and say that she or he does not want to leave. How would the prospective supervisor manage this?
7. This includes all aspects of diversity, for the child; the parent/s; and the supervisors. This can include any aspect of difference, such as:

* Medical issues: for example, a child’s need for medication during the time spent with a parent.
* Communication issues: for example, a parent may have difficulties with speech or hearing. A child and a parent may speak a language which the supervisor does not know? Should there be a rule that all communication is in a language the supervisor understands, or is this unfair?
* Physical ability: for example, can the supervisor manage to keep up with the level of physical activity demanded by the situation?
* Cultural/ religious issues: for example, the parent may wish a child to dress in a certain way, or to pray at set times. During spending time arrangements, whose standards or expectations should apply?

Diversity issues may well not be obvious. A parent, a child and a supervisor may all have different beliefs about what kind of behaviour is acceptable. Some disabilities are invisible. These may emerge during the arrangements, but it is important that such diversity issues are understood.

The combination of diversity considerations for each of the participants will cause each contact to have a unique set of challenges. The important thing is that these are thought of as much as possible before the arrangements are set uprather than while it is taking place. The outcome of discussions can be recorded in the contract.

*Practical situations are easier to sort out, but if not addressed they have the potential to destabilise spending time arrangements unnecessarily.*

1. If the venue is to be the supervisor’s home, or the parent’s home, can interruptions such as unexpected callers, demanding pets, or domestic duties be ruled out? Too long a journey to the venue may affect its quality. Is there enough space for the arrangements; or alternatively, is there too much space, which could lead to distractions?
2. A parent and his or her lawyers may well push for as long together as possible, but if is the arrangements are to be successful, the length needs to fit the child’s overall routine and lifestyle. Time will need to be structured, allowing for settling in and getting ready to go. If the child is young, is there provision for a nap, and does the time of the arrangements suit this? The supervisor may only be able to offer certain times, which may or may not fit with the child’s needs.
3. If the expectations are not understood, misunderstandings and unfair criticism are likely.
4. This includes the supervisor, the parent and the child. Will missed times be replaced? This is sometimes assumed, but it may not be right for the child.
5. Most professional supervision arrangements expect the parent to arrive significantly early, to prevent the child arriving when the parent has failed to turn up. Lateness, whatever the reason, causes resentment and confusion.
6. When will phones be on, and when will they be switched off?
7. In a case where there is any element of professional or legal involvement, it is essential that the supervisor has someone to report back to, either as a regular appointment or a reliable number to call. Not to have this link is unfair, and dramatically reduces the value of supervision.
8. This includes all equipment that may be necessary, according to the child’s age and any individual needs or disabilities.
9. There may be a particular valuable contribution that the parent can make during the contact. For example, the parent may be able to teach a musical instrument or other skill, help with homework, or bring a pet [or news of a pet], to reassure the child. Or there could be particular things to avoid. It may help to have a meeting with the child before, or as part of, arrangements are made to answer the child’s questions or to ‘clear the air’ in relation to past behaviours.

**Part III**

These outcomes should follow naturally from the evidence gathered. Remember, it is not a judgement on the person being considered, but a judgement that involves careful balancing of people’s relationships and roles within a family, the needs of this individual child, and the demands of this particular situation.

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**Suggested reading**

There is very little that is directly about family and friends supervising or supporting arrangements for children. There are several good books designed to help young children understand living in two homes, or ‘going to visit dad’. However, these may be unsuitable, as the images and storylines do not include a supervisor, so children may feel different. The following, however, may prove useful.

*For professionals*

**Ten Top Tips on Managing Contact.** Bond, H. 2007. CoramBAAF**.**

**‘It takes a village’: Placing grandparents and extended family at the centre of safeguarding vulnerable children.** Turnell, A and Essex, S, in ‘Inside Kinship Care: Understanding Family Dynamics and Providing Effective Support’, Pitcher, D [ed], 2014, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

**A strengths based approach to supervised visitation in child welfare.** Smith, GT; Shapiro, VB; Sperry, RW; LeBuffe, PA. Child Care in Practice, 20[1], 2014, 98-119.

**Parent-child supervised visitation within child welfare and custody dispute contexts: An exploratory comparison of two distinct models of practice.** Saini, M; Van Wert, M; Gofman, J. Child and Youth Services Review, 34 [1], 2012, 163-163.

*For parents and carers*

**Raising a Secure Child.** Hoffman, K; Cooper, G and Powell, B. 2017. Guilford Publications

**Understanding Your 1 Year Old, etc.** There is a series of short, readable books, one for each year of a child’s age, written by experts from the Tavistock Clinic. Series editor: Elsie Osborne. Rosendale Press.

*For children*

**The Great Big Book of Families.** Hoffman, M and Asquith, R. 2010. Frances Lincoln Children’s Books.

**No Matter What.** Gliori, D., 2017. Houghton Mifflin.

**What’s Worrying You?** Potter, M. 2018. Featherstone Educational.

**A Safe Place for Caleb: An interactive book for kids, teams and adults with issues of attachment, grief, loss and early trauma.** 2005.

**The Disappointed Dragon.** Al-Ghani, KI. 2013. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

**Sometimes I Feel Sad.** Alexander, T. 2018. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

**The Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families.** Krasny Brown, L and Brown, M. 2009. Little, Brown and Company.

**SUMMARY AND CHECKLIST**

1. All risks are clearly understood and accepted by the supervisor.

**Yes Needs more consideration**

1. The plan complies with the most recent order of the court and/ or child protection plan, if relevant.

**Yes Needs more consideration**

1. ‘Professional’ supervision is assessed as not required.

**Yes Needs more consideration**

1. The arrangement has been explained to the child/ren.

**Yes Needs more consideration**

1. Alternatives to direct supported spending time arrangements have been considered [eg remote/ video contact; letters; unsupervised arrangements].

**Yes Needs more consideration**

1. Supervisor is clear what feedback may be required, and to whom.

**Yes Needs more consideration**

1. Supervisor is clear about who to speak to for advice.

**Yes Needs more consideration**

1. Supervisor is clear about what to do if the arrangement breaks down, whether [i] immediate concerns; [ii] gradual build up of concerns.

**Yes Needs more consideration**

1. There is clarity about when and by whom the arrangement will be reviewed.

**Yes Needs more consideration**

1. There is clarity about the duration of this commitment.

**Yes Needs more consideration**